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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001477

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TAGS: KDEM PGOV PHUM PREL GG

SUBJECT: OSCE AMBASSADORS GROUP UPBEAT ON ELECTION REFORMS

REF: TBILISI 1036

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (B) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a June 18 meeting, the OSCE Ambassadors Group on Elections offered a glowing report on GOG efforts to implement suggestions delivered to Speaker Burjanadze and MP Giga Bokeria on May 2 (reftel). Council of Europe (COE) Ambassador Igor Gaon said there has been "good progress" in clarifying the voters' list, building the capacity of election administration at all levels, amending election legislation, ensuring elections are set well in advance, and reaching out to ethnic minorities. He said the amended election law will be forwarded to the COE's Venice Commission for review in July. The Ambassadors agreed to request a meeting with President Saakashvili in September -- once the Venice Commission had completed its review -- to discuss what remains to be done to ensure the elections are free, fair, and inclusive. In the meantime, the group agreed to continue working with the CEC and to reach out to the Parliamentary working group on elections, a body comprised of ruling party and opposition MPs as well as NGOs, with an eye toward resolving outstanding election issues before January ¶2008. End Summary.

A Message Heard Loud And Clear

¶2. (C) During a June 18 meeting, the OSCE Ambassadors Group on Elections offered a glowing report on GOG efforts to meet the suggestions delivered to Speaker Burjanadze and MP Giga Bokeria on May 2 (reftel). Citing increased motivation and a new willingness to cooperate at the CEC, Council of Europe (COE) Ambassador Igor Gaon said that the Group's message had clearly been heard. A European advisor managing an assistance project at the CEC agreed, adding that the CEC Chair and his staff have begun to show "real energy" in implementing the groups suggested reforms.

Progress on Every Point

¶3. (C) Gaon said the CEC would undertake a nation-wide door-to-door campaign, with the participation of opposition parties, to clarify the voters' list in September. He added that this was a joint effort supported by the COE and GOG and that the final results would be audited by a local NGO, the International Society for Free Elections and Democracy (ISFED), in cooperation with the CEC. On election administration, Gaon praised increased cooperation by the CEC with NGOs and opposition groups on an Action Plan that would be completed by July.

¶4. (C) Gaon also cited progress on amendments to election legislation, and was hopeful that the Parliament will lower the threshold for garnering party-list representation in the legislature from 7% to 5% of the national vote. he was also

optimistic that the Parliament would move the announcement of the date for elections from 60 days to 90 days before election day. He added that all changes to the election legislation must be completed by January 2008. He said the revised voter's list and other election-related documents will be distributed by the CEC in Russian, Armenian, and Azeri to ensure that ethnic minorities are properly informed of developments.

Next Steps

15. (C) Gaon said the Parliament was working at full-speed to finish amendments to the election legislation which they will submit to the COE's Venice Commission for formal review. The Commission will complete their review and forward any proposed changes to the GOG in September. The Ambassadors agreed to wait to request a meeting with President Saakashvili until the Venice Commission's findings have been published in September, in order to discuss what remains to be done to ensure free, fair, and inclusive elections.

16. (C) In the meantime, the group agreed to continue working with the CEC to improve their implementation of reforms, public outreach strategy, and to ensure they remain on schedule. Gaon added that the group needs to work with the CEC Chair, Guram Chalagashvili, to ensure he "remains transparent." Gaon added humorously that the CEC had just addressed a serious conflict of interest concern by replacing Chalagashvili's mother-in-law as CEC finance manager with someone who is not a family relation, a move that not only pleased observers, but "also made Guram very happy!" The group also agreed to reach out to the Parliamentary Working

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Group on Elections -- a body comprised of ruling party and opposition MPs as well as NGOs -- with an eye toward resolving outstanding election issues before January 2008.

Comment

17. (C) Comment: This 180 degree turn-around on the part of the CEC and the other efforts underway in Parliament are good news for Georgia's upcoming elections. It also offers more evidence that the GOG will respond quickly and convincingly when approached by representatives of the international community who share a common goal and offer specific, concrete recommendations. End Comment.

TEFFT